

Hearts and minds

Mastering emotional intelligence - the ability to manage your and others' feelings - can unlock a wealth of benefits. Emma Clarke explains how buyers can make the most of it

Emotional intelligence is for many people the most important element in determining who excels in life, and in business. It may sound like psychobabble, or a "touchy-feely" fad with no direct relevance to the world of work. But those who have developed an ability to understand and manage their own and other people's emotions - and that includes many of your suppliers' sales teams - have unlocked a treasure trove of benefits. These include improved confidence, flexibility in handling change, conflict management, improved relationships, leadership skills and better communication.

The training required to develop emotional intelligence may have a different feel to the traditional round of forecasting and supplier analysis courses more familiar to purchasers. But those curious or eager to try a new, softer and more personal approach to development may find skills that can assist not only in negotiations with suppliers but also in gaining respect from colleagues, bosses and senior management in other functions. It has had some pretty positive effects in their private life, too.

Improving techniques

The concept of emotional intelligence was first coined in 1990 by US psychologists John D Mayer and Peter Salovey. But it was Daniel Goleman who popularised the concept in 1995 in his bestselling book, Emotional Intelligence.

Goleman splits emotional intelligence into five areas:

- self-awareness (understanding yourself, your strengths and weaknesses and how you appear to others)
- self-regulation (the ability to control yourself and think before you act)

- motivation (the drive to work and succeed)
- empathy (understanding other people's viewpoints)
- social skills (managing relationships and communication)

There are many types of assessment available to measure the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ). These include self-assessment questionnaires, mapping exercises, 360 degree feedback, and psychometric tests to measure self-confidence, decisiveness, sociability, tolerance and consideration for others.

Emotional intelligence can be developed, so once your EQ is established you will have a clearer idea of the areas that need improvement. One form of training for EI is neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). Techniques of NLP include examining eye accessing cues (using a person's eye movements to gauge how they are thinking), body language and the way people tick to give a more intuitive approach to relationships and negotiation. It is thought that by understanding how people react, or how they process information, you can better adapt your method and style of communication.

Judging by the reactions of those who attended a recent CIPS masterclass on emotional intelligence, this type of training will become popular for purchasers. For Steve Elliott, EMEA procurement manager at software firm Novell, the course was an awakening. He States: 'There are so many courses on negotiation that all arrive at the same thing, breaking it down into bargaining, concessions and emotions. But as businesses move forward, things become more complex and we need to build on these skills. This is the first time there has been any proper structure of influencing and negotiation.'

Emotional intelligence may be a relatively new concept for purchasers, it certainly isn't new for sales professionals. Belinda

Turner, procurement director at Cancer Research UK, thinks it is high time for purchasers to get the same training as their counterparts in sales to put them on an equal footing in negotiations. Sales people ask all the right questions and push all the right buttons and are really in tune with you. That's how they succeed, she points out.

It does work

One of the few UK purchasing teams that has been through a comprehensive EI development process is Rok Property Solutions. The procurement team worked with training consultancy Cordie to complete the assessments. Each of the 25 members were given a development plan that led to one-to-one coaching sessions, on-the-job training and courses in negotiation and NLP.

Jane Gibbs, Rok supply chain director and CIPS president, says that rather than being a replacement for another form of negotiation training, NLP techniques offer an extra tool to help staff achieve better results.

At the beginning of the process, Gibbs says that buyers were prone to compromise in negotiations. They weren't really able to influence even though they desperately wanted to. They didn't have a huge amount of intuition and their motivation was low.

But after nine months of training she has proof that her team are using more powerful negotiation tools. In construction there is an annual price increase that buyers traditionally accept. This year it hasn't happened. Buyers have gone back and challenged suppliers, asking for justification. And this has had some tangible results.

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"The team really believes that it has changed too. I have heard some people saying things like 'I really felt I had got beneath the skin of that guy' when coming out of a negotiation."

Ability to influence

The procurement team at Zurich Financial Services in the UK did an EI workshop and EQ evaluation in March 2004, followed by a series of NLP workshops. Melvin Pugh, UK procurement manager, says the training in eye accessing cues has been invaluable for buyers in negotiation with suppliers. You often hear buyers say things such as, 'I had a gut feeling' or 'I knew there was something wrong!'. But with NLP, you are backing up that gut feeling with some meaningful observation.

And improving negotiation techniques is just the beginning. A key element of emotional intelligence is the ability to influence - a skill that is becoming crucial for purchasers that want to extend their sphere of influence within organisations. Elliott explains: Purchasing needs to get away from the stage where it is apologising for being at the table, to influencing at a high level. We need to look at how we can get in front of senior people, and when we get there, how we can influence and deliver the message that we want.

To be able to command respect from stakeholders in an organisation, purchasing needs to be more proactive and creative with its skills base, according to Anna Biddle, procurement manager at Axa. We are exhausting all the quick wins in purchasing. We now need to become more refined and creative, and we have to think about new ways to attract people to our services.

Biddle believes the NLP techniques she learnt at the CIPS masterclass are one solution. One technique helps you

determine if people are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. I am quite a visual person and not a big report writer. So in the past I have approached colleagues with my personal preference of communication. But if they just want to see a two-page brief with bullet points instead of a visual presentation, I would have missed out on an opportunity.

"If you can sell yourself effectively to the right people by understanding their communication preferences, you have a better chance of getting their support," she says.

Christopher Barrat, director of the Greystone partnership, is working with a large food supplier to build its purchasing team's self-awareness. He says: The head of the function believes that self-awareness is a core competency as it can help staff in everything they do. Self-awareness and self-motivation both help staff pick themselves up when they are down and helps them to think about what they want to be, which means they are more motivated to do it.

But what if better self-awareness prompts a member of staff to leave their job? Barrat argues it is better they do this sooner rather than later.

When Rok first started to develop the emotional intelligence of its team, Gibbs says staff self-confidence and motivation were at a low. But by developing their self-awareness and helping them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, the team is now more motivated. They really think there's a direction and a willingness to do things differently.

What makes a pleasant change, says Gibbs, is that other parts of the business now want the training that purchasing has received, instead of the other way round. This has helped me

to develop my role in Rok, as people see me as a business player, not just a purchasing player.

A note of caution

Tempting as it may seem, purchasers are warned not to send staff on an emotional intelligence course and expect all their training requirements to be met in one go. Emotional intelligence should be just one element in an armoury of skills.

Barrat elaborates: If you want to be a better buyer then you need to understand category purchasing, negotiation, and spend analysis. EI is just an underlying approach that will make these tools more effective.

Positive results of the training may also be harder and slower to realise. In his previous role as head of purchasing, when Barrat implemented self-awareness and NLP training with his team, he admits the most tangible result was that many of his staff left. But they left for jobs they would never have achieved before.

Other results were harder to define and took longer to materialise, he says. You can't just say 'where are the savings?', you need to measure the longer-term results. There needs to be a shift from training people to developing staff and their underlying skills, he says. You may get less of a return now but it is going to be better for you in the long run.

It is also important to look beyond the sphere of purchasing. My job is about coaching these guys to move forward in senior management, not to just stay in purchasing, says Gibbs. I want to develop their skills to become area leaders across the business. And the higher up the tree you go, the more you need influencing skills.

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Greystone's Barrat adds that emotional intelligence should be applied to your whole life and not just your work. You can't park your emotional intelligence when you go home, he says.

In fact, Zurich's Pugh adds, the skills he has developed through NLP training have been of use more often in his life outside work. He has had some fantastic results with a football team of 11-year-olds that he coaches. If there were lads that couldn't kick the ball and were getting more and more frustrated, I encouraged them to picture success in their minds. This has given them confidence, and it works."

Handle with care

To some, the concept of emotional intelligence may sound too woolly or too dissociated with the everyday realities of purchasing to ever give it a shot. This attitude, acknowledges Barrat, could be the biggest barrier to the success of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

"People are often genuinely scared of asking themselves big questions such as, who am I? What do I want and how am I going to get it? Most people fear change and are not in control of what they want to do." After all, he says, people might not want to be too self-aware, because it might lead them to leave their job.

This is why it is also important to choose a course leader carefully. The growing popularity in emotional intelligence and training methods such as NLP has meant that a number of untrained course leaders have materialised to cash in. Although the content is available from the internet, says Barrat, there is a skill in making it relevant to people's everyday lives at work.

A course leader must also demonstrate sensitivity and a professional approach. By looking at who you are and how you are perceived by others, you can end up feeling exposed. It is pretty unusual to run an EI course without seeing someone end up in tears. The course leader needs to be able to cope with that.

And don't expect a two-day course to be a quick fix: developing emotional intelligence is a life's goal. Or, as Barrat puts it - it's not a diet, but a way of eating.

When Gibbs received the scores from her team's first emotional intelligence assessment, she was daunted by how big the process was going to be. There were a few people who were really good, but I thought a lot of them were going to struggle. But they have come flying through down to their aptitude and their determination, she says.

Though development is ongoing, it is possible to start seeing positive benefits from NLP training from day one, says Novell's Elliott. There is an immediate awakening where you find yourself looking at people's body language, their eyes and listening to their responses. You find yourself discovering people and you try to change the way you deal with them.

Some skills are also easier to develop than others, says Andrea Reynolds, Cordie's managing director. Influence, interpersonal sensitivity and self-awareness skills are the easiest. Emotional resilience is more difficult and requires coaching, and motivation is down to you and your organisation.

As you develop, the benefits keep coming. In the short term, a high level of emotional intelligence may mean the marketing department allows you to take over their advertising spend or

that you get your European purchasing consortium to buy to the right specification.

In the long term, says Barrat, you can achieve whatever you wish. I know this sounds a bit over the top, but if you do it, you will get everything you want.

The seven areas of emotional intelligence

The leading UK academics in emotional intelligence - Professor Malcolm Higgs and Professor Victor Dulewicz from Henley Management College - have identified seven elements of EI.

1. Self-awareness: The awareness of your own feelings and the ability to recognise and manage these.
2. Emotional resilience: The ability to perform well and consistently in a range of situations and when under pressure.
3. Motivation: The drive and energy that you have to achieve results, balance short-term and long-term goals and pursue your goals in the face of challenge and rejection.
4. Interpersonal sensitivity: The ability to be aware of the needs and feelings of others and to use this awareness effectively in interacting with them and arriving at decisions that have an impact on them.
5. Influence: The ability to persuade others to change their viewpoint on a problem, issue or decision.
6. Intuitiveness: The ability to use insight and interaction to arrive at and implement decisions when faced with ambiguous or incomplete information.
7. Conscientiousness and integrity: The ability to display commitment to a course of action in the face of challenge, to act consistently and in line with understood ethical requirements.

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Source: Andrea Reynolds, Cordie. Based on research by Professor Malcolm Higgs and Professor Victor Dulewicz

Further reading

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman
The EQ Difference: A Powerful Plan for Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work by Adele B Lynn
Executive EQ: Emotional Intelligence in Business by Robert K Cooper and Ayman Sawaf
Emotional Intelligence & Negotiation by Andrea Reynolds

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